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ABSTRACT

Research studies in art education are done under certain methodological conditions, for specified purposes, and from selected philosophical perspectives. In this study, empirical research published in "Studies in Art Education" (volumes 1-33, 1960-1993, 195 studies) was analyzed. A research art style is considered as resulting from the types of art that are studied and produced and from the ways students are asked to respond to art in formal research studies. Art produced or responded to in research studies was found to constitute a research art style that is design-oriented and formalistic, traditional in media and technique, and of Western cultural origin. (Contains 16 references and 1 table.) (Author/SLD)

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Identifying a Research Art Style in Art Education

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Abstract

Research studies in art education are done under certain methodological conditions, for specified purposes, and from selected philosophical perspectives. In this study, empirical research published in Studies in Art Education (volumes 1-33, 1960-1993) was analyzed. Art produced or responded to in research studies was found to constitute a research art style that is design oriented and formalistic, traditional in media and technique, and of Western cultural origin.

Identifying a Research Art Style in Art Education

In art education, various styles of art are present. Most obviously, historical art styles are studied in art history. Outside school instruction, Wilson (1985) found similarities and consistencies among children's graphic expressions; he believed children, much as adult artists, work within child art styles that are personal as well as shared. Efland (1976) considered much of the art produced by students as constituting a school art style that does not exist outside the confines of formalized instruction. Undoubtedly, other styles of artistic expression and response exist that shape and frame art education ideas and practices, e.g., art styles of textbooks, curriculum guidelines, and policy publications. However, no research has been conducted on these art styles, and none has been conducted on types of art given attention within art education research itself. The hypothesis of this study is that a style of artistic expression and response exists within the professional culture of research activities in art education and that such a style can be identified within published art education research. It is proposed that there is a need to identify and analyze the style of art used in research studies in order to understand how research art might relate to ways art educators interpret students' art work, develop school curricula, and select art examples for instructional purposes.

The purpose of this study is to describe and analyze art in empirical (qualitative and quantitative)[1] art education research in order to understand the type of research knowledge constructed and

perpetuated within the field of art education. In this study, a research art style is considered as resulting from the types of art studied and produced within art education research as well as how students are asked to respond to art in formal research studies. In other words, research art style is not just a matter of the physical, perceptual characteristics of art; it is also the way or style in which individuals are asked to make art and respond to art. In this sense, a semiotic, postmodern interpretation of style is presented (Barthes, 1970; Zurmuehlen, 1992). Style, as used in this paper, is the sum-total of characteristics of art, including its physical nature, how it is produced, its context, and how it is responded to by research subjects.

Background

Ostensibly, art education research is undertaken to advance and change the field. It has been argued that research, when presented from a variety of perspectives, presents occasions for existential choice among alternative modes of thinking and acting (Hamblen, 1989). Certainly research, and particularly theoretical research, has advanced thinking on a variety of issues. However, Lanier (1975) noted, less optimistically, that the more the field of art education seemed to change in its literature, the more it tended to stay the same in practice. Many of the proposals of the 1960s and 1970s remained just that: proposals on social responsibility, environmental awareness, aesthetic education, and critical consciousness, with little or no examination in empirical research and relatively little application in practice. For example,

according to Pariser and Zimmerman (1990), an empirical research and instructional application time-lag currently exists on matters of gender in art education. In other words, most research (and its implementation in practice) tends to be conservative, with a considerable time-lag between new ideas (theory) and their expression in empirical research.

Research activities are embedded within the taken-for-granted knowledge of the field and may serve to support, extend, and even obscure current assumptions as well as curtail new possibilities. The research community constitutes a culture of accepted modes of research, condoned research topics, and valued research publications. Much research is done on the basis of what has been previously done and what fits accepted methodologies and procedures—and what fits current thinking about what deserves study. Some studies build upon and develop thinking about particular issues; others fit into predictable and accepted patterns and methods. A research culture exists that supports its own values, attitudes, and beliefs (see Kuhn, 1970). This does not mean, however, that research must be only a perpetuation of itself. One might suggest that truly vital and healthy research communities engage in reflective, meta-research that examines or even undermines its own tenets and tests the limitations of its research characteristics and methodologies. For example, research proceeding from the perspectives of reflective analysis, critical consciousness, and social theory allow for the examination of assumptions and typifications of the field in general and of research in particular (see Apple, 1986, 1990; Bowers, 1984, 1987; Bowers & Pinar, 1992). One might note, however, that these

self-reflective perspectives are essentially theoretical in nature with links to practice (praxis) somewhat tenuous or vague. Classroom instruction more closely resembles empirical research than it resembles theoretical research and theoretical proposals. This empirical bias might be expected and even desired inasmuch as such research is involved in examining aspects of current classroom practice. The results of this study, however, indicate that only limited aspects of art education practice surface in research studies, and limited attention is given to extending instruction possibilities.

Most empirical studies in art education reflect, not the cutting edge of the field, but traditional assumptions and practices that become self-fulfilling. This study proceeds from the rationale that there are taken-for-granted assumptions regarding the art used in art education research studies, that such art constitutes a research art style, and that this research art style needs to be examined for the character and limitations it imposes upon art education curriculum and policy choices.

Methods

This study consisted of a review and analysis of art in empirical (quantitative and qualitative) research published in Studies in Art Education from 1960 to 1993, volumes 1-33. Research articles appear in other journals, numerous studies are presented at conferences, and action research is informally conducted and discussed throughout the field. Studies in Art Education, however, was selected as the data base for this study because it is the main research journal in art education,

it is published by the National Art Education Association, and it provides a continuous and permanent source of research articles. As such, this data source was selected as more-or-less representative of major ongoing published research interests and activities of the field.

Empirical research articles in Studies in Art Education were identified that dealt with individuals either making or responding to art. Analysis was limited to articles dealing with empirical research, either qualitative or quantitative in methodology. (See footnote number 1.) Since quantitative research studies, and particularly those involving statistics, have highly prescribed and specifically proscribed methods of procedure, it was considered important to include qualitative empirical studies in this review of research. Qualitative empirical studies were included to "control" for the specificity of quantitative approaches by allowing for studies that did not have, for example, strict time requirements for art production and/or response.

The analysis was focused on art per se in the articles, in terms of physical characteristics, production, response, and interpretation. It is important to note that this precluded empirical studies focused otherwise, such as surveys of art education programs, the gathering of baseline information, and the construction of professional attitudinal profiles.

Research art in the articles was analyzed in terms of media, technique, cultural origin, and historical style as well as in terms of ways research subjects were asked to interact with art. Since subjects are often asked both to make and respond to art, the analysis and

subsequent tabulation did not provide a distinction between expression and response. The tabulations indicate the presence or frequency of the following dimensions: media (traditional or nontraditional), technique (traditional or nontraditional), cultural origins (Western or Non-Western), fine art, non-fine art, realism, formalism, creativity, preference/expression, and "school art."

Paint, paper, pencils, clay, etc., were considered traditional media. Likewise, painting, drawing, sculpting, pasting, etc., were considered traditional techniques. Traditional was defined as commonly occurring within school instruction. The Western cultural origin dimension was tabulated for core-culture European and American art, with the Non-Western dimension tabulated for any other cultural origins and for the art of minority populations within Europe and America. Fine art was distinguished from non-fine art, with the former considered to be the type of art that appears in art history texts and is displayed in fine art museums. For example, research that dealt with the designed environment or the popular arts received non-fine art tabulation. The realism dimension was tabulated for art created or responded to that was representational or that required a response that dealt with representation. For example, if research subjects were asked to draw a picture of their homes, the study would receive a "realism" tabulation; the realism dimension would also be tabulated for a study in which subjects were asked to sort art objects according to degree of realism. The dimensions of formalism, creativity, and preference/expression were

likewise tabulated when subjects made or responded to art in these ways or with these outcomes. It was, therefore, possible for a research study to be tabulated in all of the dimensions. If subjects were asked to draw their home within a landscape and the resulting drawings were analyzed according to line quality, the study would receive tabulations in realism and formalism dimensions. The last dimension, "school art," was included to provide an overall sense of whether research studies dealt with art in a way compatible with commonly observed school art instruction and activities. The converse of school art, a nonschool or nontraditional dimension, was not included since it received no tabulations; none of the studies reviewed explored alternatives to school art practices.

From tabulations within each of these dimensions, an analysis was presented indicating commonalities and differences, and a research style was identified. Although numerical frequencies were presented, the focus of this study was on providing a qualitative and interpretative analysis of research art style characteristics.

Results

From volumes 1-33 of Studies in Art Education from 1960-1993, 195 studies were identified as empirical research and as dealing with art within the general areas of production, response, and interpretation. In all respects, the numerical tabulations of frequency bore out the hypothesis that modal characteristics can be identified and that a research art style exists in art education. This research art style is design oriented, formalistic, and traditional in media and technique; it

also tends to be fine art that is of Western origin.

Insert Table 1 about here.

In some instances, researchers did not specify the type of art included in their studies or were vague as to type. Studies received tabulations only within identifiable dimensions. Also, it is important to note that all the dimensions do not apply equally to each separate study. Tabulations indicate the presence of a dimension. The absence of a tabulation does not necessarily indicate the presence of its opposite. For example, the percentage of 36.9% for fine art does not indicate that 63.1% of the studies dealt with non-fine art; percentages do not total 100%. In the following paragraph, tabulations for each dimension are reported in raw numbers followed by the percentage.

As shown in Table 1, researchers have tended to focus on art-subject relationships that utilize traditional media (104, 53.3%) and traditional techniques (95, 48.7%) and that focus on Western (73, 37.4%) fine art (72, 36.9%). Although realism (48, 24.6%) was a relatively strong focus, formalism (85, 43.6%) was stronger. Interpretations requiring creativity (48, 24.6%) were common, with a fair number of studies calling for expressive responses or the indication of preference (28, 14.4%). Overall, most empirical research reviewed was compatible with or closely resembled school art activities (129, 66.2%).

It was not the purpose of this study to analyze how research might or

might not change over time. However, it can be seen that while Non-Western and non-fine art were often not included, they are more prevalent since volume 17, 1975-76. Likewise, the few tabulations of nontraditional media and nontraditional techniques that were made appear in recent research (volumes 33 and 34, 1991-92 and 1992-93). As indicated by raw numbers and percentages, these so-called newer appearances are rare and cannot truly be called trends or developments. Overtime, art education research has remained remarkably consistent in regard to the types of art responded to and produced.

Discussion

Results of this study indicate that commonalities among research art can be identified. This might be anticipated since research studies in art education are done under certain methodological conditions, for specified purposes, and from shared philosophical perspectives. Until the last decade and the proposal of discipline-based art education, art education practice and much art education research consisted of a child-developmental focus within the applications of studio work that emphasized in various ways formalism and design properties, types of art production, creativity, and self-expression. Currently, multicultural art education, instruction extending beyond the fine arts, gender sensitive content, etc., appear primarily in research literature as theoretical proposals. These "new" perspectives in art education have not yet surfaced to any extent in the very concrete expressions of empirical research.

These above-cited conditions, purposes, and perspectives constitute a culture of art education research. A culture of art education research

generates a basic, recognizable research art style among art objects presented, produced, and responded to in research studies. In general, the research art style is design oriented, formalistic, and traditional in media and technique; it consists of fine art of Western origin. This does not mean that other types of art are not studied by researchers or that there are not variations on research art studied, but rather that a research art style emerges with these above-cited modal characteristics.

Although not specifically tabulated, observations were also made on how research was conducted and possible relationships between art education assumptions and school art practices. The review of empirical research indicated that art education researchers have tended to focus on art activities in their research that require little supervision or management and that are not "messy," i.e., activities that lend themselves to relatively easy collection and analysis. Much research art is produced within specified time limits and within school or semi-controlled environments. Most children's art that has been studied is based on traditional school media and occurs within the assumptions of what constitutes valued school art experiences, e.g., art that is not copied, not based on popular media, not dealing with taboo subject matter, and not from collaborative projects (see Duncum, 1989; Efland, 1976, 1990).

Conclusions

This study suggests that the research art style, rather than serving to extend or examine assumptions and school activities, essentially reproduces and reifies the conservative aspects of

traditional schooling. Identified commonalities among research art indicate that researchers are, in many cases, promoting a limited knowledge of particular types of art. Many of the students' art experiences (multicultural, folk, popular, commercial, collaborative, etc.,) do not receive research attention and subsequent validation. More subtly, the research art style is part of the taken-for-granted knowledge of art education research inasmuch as research selections and methods of operation are themselves not examined. It is surmised that the research art style supports and perhaps influences the following in art education curricula and policy decisions: formalistic interpretations of art, use of traditional media and subject matter, an emphasis on design principles, and the validation of individualistic art work and responses.

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Footnote

[1]Eisner (1979) pointed out that empirical research includes both quantitative (statistical) and qualitative studies that deal with observable, empirical phenomena or information.

Table Caption

Table 1. Research art style characteristics: Studies in Art Education.

Issue	Number of Articles	Traditional Media	Nontraditional Media	Traditional Techniques	Nontraditional Techniques	Western Art	Non-Western Art	Fine Art	Non-Fine Art	Realism	Formalism	Creativity	Preference/-Expression	"School Art"
Vol. 1 1960	2					2		2		1	2	2	1	2
Vol. 2 1960-61	4	2		2		1				1	3	1		4
Vol. 3 1961-62	3	3		1						1		1		3
Vol. 4 1962-63	12	8		6		3		2	1	2	5	2	2	8
Vol. 5 1963-64	2	2		2								2		2
Vol. 6 1964-65	3	2		2		1				2	2	1	1	3
Vol. 7 1965-66	6	6		6		1				4	3	2	1	5
Vol. 8 1966-67	8	7		5		2		2		3	2	1		6
Vol. 9 1967-68	5	2		2		1	1	1		2	2	3	2	4
Vol. 10 1968-69	9	4		3		4		4		2	3	4	3	5
Vol. 11 1969-70	8	5		4		1		1		1	5	1		6
Vol. 12 1970-71	7	3		3		5		5		2	3	3	1	5
Vol. 13 1971-72	9	4		4		3		2		1	3	2		6
Vol. 14 1972-73	14	5		5		4	1	7	2	2	2	2	1	10
Vol. 15 1973-74	9	2		2		5		5			4	2	1	5
Vol. 16 1974-75	2	1		1			1							1
Vol. 17 1975-76	4	1		1		2	1	3			2			2
Vol. 18 1976-77	7	6		5		2	1	2	1	2	4	3	2	5
Vol. 19 1977-78	5	3		3		2		2		1	3	2	1	4
Vol. 20 1978-79	10	4		3		5	1	5	1		7	2	3	6
Vol. 21 1979-80	8	4		4		2	1	2			4	3	2	6
Vol. 22 1980-81	8	5		5		4		4		5	7		2	7
Vol. 23 1981-82	5									1	2			1
Vol. 24 1982-83	5	3		4		1		1		2	1	1		2
Vol. 25 1983-84	7	1		1		4		4		3	4	2	1	4
Vol. 26 1984-85	3	2		2		2		2		2	2		1	1
Vol. 27 1985-86	3	1		1		2	1	2		3	1	1		
Vol. 28 1986-87	4	2		2		1	1	1		1	2			1
Vol. 29 1987-88	6	4		4		2		2		1	1		2	4
Vol. 30 1988-89	2	2		2							1			2
Vol. 31 1989-90	3	2		2		1		1		1	1	1		2
Vol. 32 1990-91	2	2		2								1	1	2
Vol. 33 1991-92	4	2	1	2	1	2		2			1	1		2
Vol. 34 1992-93	6	3	1	3	1	3	2	3	2	2	3	2		3
Total	195	104	2	95	2	73	11	72	7	48	85	48	28	129
		53.3%	1.0%	48.7%	1.0%	37.4%	5.6%	36.9%	3.6%	24.6%	43.6%	24.6%	14.4%	66.2%

Table 1. Research Art Style Characteristics: Studies in Art Education